



Spring 2009 Edition

## Play a Role in the State Budget Process

Public hearings are taking place this week at the State Capitol on how California tackles an estimated \$21.3 billion budget deficit following defeat of the budget propositions at the May 19 Special Election.



The Legislature has convened a joint Senate/Assembly conference committee to review the budget proposed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and to begin examining ways to close the shortfall. Overviews of the state's took place on May 21 and May 22, followed by hearings on May 26 and May 27 in Sacramento including public testimony\*. They are also televised live and will be available for viewing following the hearing on the California Channel. To view televised broadcasts, live or archived, go to [www.calchannel.com](http://www.calchannel.com) and select the Video On Demand tab. Schedules are subject to change. Go to [www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov) for the latest hearing schedules.

# Good Things Happening in the 41<sup>st</sup> AD

In spite of the fact that the budget situation has been dominating the headlines, there have actually been lots of good things happening at my office that I want to share with you.

## IN THE CAPITOL

It was an honor to be **re-appointed to Chair the Assembly Select Committee on Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**, that works on issues related to community colleges, California State University, and the University of California, and on ways we can maintain the legacy laid out by the California Master Plan on Higher Education and maintain the state's priority on higher education.

On March 25, as Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, I moderated a panel on "Early Childhood and K-12 Collaborations and Linkages" at a **"Learning Begins at Birth" conference**. My questions focused on brokering partnerships between public and private schools to increase diversity, what school districts have been doing to promote early childhood education, and easing transition from preschool to K-12.



*Photo: Christopher Holmes*

I was very pleased to also be appointed by Speaker Karen Bass to the **State Allocation Board**, which administers education bond funds for new school construction and modernization. The Board apportions an average of \$180 million/month for K-12 projects. Since 1998, the Board has allocated \$28 billion from Propositions 1A, Prop. 47, Prop. 55, and Prop. 1D in 2006. These funds helped relieve overcrowding; promote energy efficient schools; and to build charter schools, career tech facilities, and joint use projects between districts and local government, higher ed, and nonprofits.



*l-r: Jesse Switzer, Susan Oster, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, Henry Oster, Erik Hayden*

**Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony** – For the past six years, the State Assembly has honored Holocaust survivors in April during California Holocaust Memorial Week. The Holocaust Memorial Project collects the stories of survivors by pairing them with students who conduct interviews and write essays of the survivors' lives. This year, I had the privilege of bringing together Henry Oster and Pepperdine University student (and former AD41 intern) Erik Hayden. Erik's essay was a poignant account of Mr. Oster's harrowing tale and has now become a part of California's official state record. The survivors were honored with a special Assembly Floor ceremony, which is always an emotional experience and this year was particularly so.

## AROUND THE DISTRICT

Every year each state Assemblymember and Senator has the chance to honor a woman of accomplishment as his or her **"Woman of the Year."** This year I selected Ventura County activist Sharon Hillbrant as my Woman of the Year at a special Assembly floor session that is always a part of Women's History Month in Sacramento.



*l-r: Speaker Karen Bass, Sharon Hillbrant, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, Assemblyman Mike Villines*

County Community Foundation's Social Justice Fund, member of the National Women's Political Caucus, and board member of Destino: The Hispanic Legacy Fund Vision Committee, which steers an endowment fund dedicated to meeting the needs of Latinos in Ventura County.

The **Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation** held its annual meeting in April, where I was pleased to swear in their new Board. The Federation is a coalition of roughly 20 homeowner associations in and around the Santa Monica Mountains which has provided a strong and still growing voice for preservation of the rural character and natural beauty of the area in all planning and development decisions.



*l-r: Senator Fran Pavley, Steve Hess, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley*

Always a much-anticipated highlight is the naming of their "Citizen of the Year." This year's honored **"Citizen of the Year" – Steve Hess**, a true champion of the environment. State Senator Fran Pavley and I presented a joint resolution from the State of California to Steve honoring his long commitment to protecting the Santa Monicas.



I had the opportunity to take a **tour of Valley Village**, which is a model facility providing a very high level of services for people with developmental disabilities. Beginning in 1971 as a place for community-based family-style housing for developmentally disabled children who were graduating from the public school system, Valley Village has grown in its advocacy role and services, and now operates 17 group homes and three day programs in the San Fernando Valley, including adult day health care, behavioral management, 24-hour nursing care, after school care, and a semi-independent living program. It was both uplifting and inspiring to witness the caring and supportive work that Valley Village is doing. Before helping to present me with the kind certificate of appreciation, their oldest resident, now in his 60s, gave it a good going over.



## Tons of Speeches

As Chair of the Education Committee, I've been doing lots and lots of speeches on education issues, including at rallies, on panels, and at school visits. Here are just a few highlights.

On April 18, I joined Governor Schwarzenegger on April 18 for his announcement on **stimulus money for education**. California was the first state in the nation to receive federal stimulus dollars for education, which I choose to think may have been a recognition of the very high priority that Californians place on quality education for their children.



On April 20, I held a press conference at Charles Mack Elementary in Sacramento to promote my bill, **AB 821, The Clean and Healthy Schools Act**. School custodians demonstrated four-filter vacuum cleaners they strap on their backs and futuristic-looking squirt bottled that use electrically-charged tap water with ionized water that attracts dirt like a magnet. They had a meter that measures bacteria on a surface before and after cleaning, that showed astonishing drops in bacteria after using the green cleaners. Since making the switch from traditional toxic cleaners the district has recorded fewer absences due to asthma, the number one cause of school absences due to chronic illness. The district believes it actually saves month by reducing the number of cleaners they once had to stock and by reducing worker illness and injury. The audience was wowed.



On May 6, I spoke to hundreds of people at a rally on the North steps of the Capitol on the need for **access to quality child care**. I pledged to fight for increased access for working families and to try and keep child care fees affordable.

On May 13, I rallied with over 1,000 parents, teachers and students, organized by the Campaign for Quality Education to promote **my bills ACR 54 and AB 8**. ACR 54 expresses the Legislature's intent to adequately and equitably fund education so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve economic security and pursue their dreams. When I introduced ACR 54, it sparked an hour-long debate on the Assembly Floor, resulting in 47 Assemblymember signing on as co-authors, all of them outraged that California is nearly at the bottom of the nation in per-pupil spending. Some calculations are now putting California dead last. Even in these very challenging financial times, it's still all about asking ourselves what our vision is for California, with education at the forefront.



It was my education accountability bill, AB 8, however, that had the crowd really fired up. They had lugged thousands of postcards to the Capitol, calling on the Governor to sign the bill. I was interrupted with cheers from the crowd as I described how AB 8 will empower local communities to demand accountability from their schools by making the budgeting process crystal clear and ensure that people can easily see where their education dollars are going and what the outcomes are. The loudest applause may have been when I said that Californians deserve to have every one of their lawmakers pledge their intention to adequately fund our public schools so that our students have the best shot possible at competing in a global marketplace.

That same day, I chaired an Assembly informational hearing on "School Finance – Equity and Adequacy."



## Visitors to the Capitol



Ocean explorer and Ocean Futures Society Founder **Jean-Michel Cousteau** was in the Capitol in March. He was recognized for his life's work by the full Assembly on our beautiful Assembly Floor, one day after Oceans Day. I'm proud to count Cousteau as one of my constituents, and also as a supporter of my bill, AB 68, which will help reduce the use of flimsy plastic bags that are polluting our oceans and sickening and killing marine life.



Civil rights leader, **Rev. Jesse Jackson** also visited in March to urge the Legislature to reduce interest rates on college loans and to promote volunteerism.



A true hero dropped by the Capitol – U.S. Airways Capt. **Chesley B. Sullenberger III**. You'll remember "Sully" as the pilot whose plane suffered a failure of both engines when it sucked in a flock of geese. In the face of what might have been certain death for 155 people on board, his extraordinary calm and skill enabled him to safely land the plane in the Hudson River without a single loss of life. It was a privilege to meet this modest, but exceptional, man.

## 2007-08 Scorecards

Although the work is truly the reward, still, it's always nice to have one's work recognized. I am proud to have received perfect scores based on my voting record on 2007-08 legislation from five groups. I supported all ten of the **Sierra Club** priority bills when they came to the Floor. I also earned a perfect score from the **California Labor Federation**, the **National Association of Social Workers**, the **Congress of California Seniors**, and the **American Cancer Society**.

I scored 96%, voting for 24 of 25 bills supported by the **Children's Advocacy Institute**, but no lawmaker scored higher since the 25<sup>th</sup> bill died in a fiscal committee.

## Recognitions

In March, the Junior Leagues of California State Public Affairs Committee named me as "**2009 Legislator of the Year.**" In their congratulatory letter, the statewide delegation said it was "impressed with your first-term legislative package containing meaningful reform" in the areas of education, violence prevention, family support and health, all areas supported by the Junior Leagues. I enjoyed meeting many of the Junior Leaguers when they were in Sacramento and we gathered in a beautiful committee room in the historic part of the State Capitol.



On April 18 the Sherman Oaks Democratic Club held their annual Lesley Devine Memorial event, where I had the honor of being recognized as the Club's "**Elected Representative of the Year.**" Congratulations to fellow honorees Jim Hilfenhaus, who received the Lesley Devine Award, and Moreen Blum, who was presented with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

## WeConnect links Californians with Vital Services

While too many Californians continue to struggle during this severe economic downturn, the state has set up a new website to connect people who need help with services that are available right now at [www.weconnect.net](http://www.weconnect.net). You'll find information on tax credits, utility and telephone discounts, California's low-cost auto insurance program, food banks, job resources, college and technical education assistance, and more. This informative website was created by California's First Lady Maria Shriver and has loads of information that many people may not know about.

You can also check out [www.cafoodbanks.org](http://www.cafoodbanks.org) for information on where food assistance can be found, or how you can help someone who's hungry if you're able.

## ***Committee and Legislative Appointments***

**Chair, Assembly Education Committee  
Chair, Select Committee on Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Member:  
Assembly Budget Committee  
Assembly Judiciary Committee  
Assembly Natural Resources Committee  
Budget Subcommittee #1 – Health and Human Services  
Budget Subcommittee #2 – Education Finance  
Select Committee on Domestic Violence**

**Member, State Allocations Board  
California Commission on the Status of Women**

**Legislative Liaison, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission  
Legislative Participant, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy**

### **HOW TO REACH ME:**

#### **District Office:**

6355 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Suite 205  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367  
Phones: (818) 596-4141 . (805) 644-4141 . (310) 395-3414  
Fax: (818) 596-4150

#### **Capitol Office:**

State Capitol  
P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0041  
Phone: (916) 319-2041  
Fax: (916) 319-2141

[democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a41/](http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a41/) or [www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov)